Investigating gender differences in psychopathy using a community sample: Empathy, anxiety and self-control.

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Aims of the Presentation

- Provide an overview of previous research
- Explain the methodology and results of the current study
- To discuss the implications of the results and to suggest ideas for future research

General Psychopathy

- Psychopathy is defined as a disorder of personality (Chakhssi et al., 2010)
- It is characterised by a range of affective and behavioural features (Skeem et al., 2002)

General Psychopathy

Affective	Behavioural
Shallow affect	Poor behavioural control
Superficial charm	Proneness to boredom
Sense of grandiosity	Promiscuous sexual behaviour
Manipulative	Lack of self-control
Lack of remorse or guilt	Criminal versatility
Callousness and lack of empathy	
Failure to accept responsibility	

(Dolan & Doyle, 2007)

Primary and Secondary Psychopathy

- Primary psychopathy broadly comprises of the affective deficits associated with psychopathy

- Secondary psychopathy is characterised by the behavioural issues related to the disorder

(Moreira et al., 2014)

Gender Differences in Psychopathy

- When compared higher rates of psychopathy are found in men than women (Dolan & Vollm, 2009)
- It may just be that psychopathic traits are expressed differently in men and women (Wynn et al., 2012)

Empathy, Anxiety and Self-Control

- According to the literature primary psychopathy is most often associated with low emotional empathy and low anxiety (Hale et al., 2004; Honk & Schutter, 2006)

- Secondary psychopathy is mostly associated with high anxiety and low self-control (Ray et al., 2009; Sandvik et al., 2015)

Gender Differences in Psychopathic Traits

- Research is limited in regard to gender differences in individual psychopathic traits

- In general, women tend to score higher in empathy (cognitive and emotional), anxiety, and self-control than men (Stoyanova & Hope, 2012; Jo & Bouffard, 2014; Jonason & Kroll, 2015)

Aims and Rationale of the Study

- To add to the literature on psychopathy
- Investigate gender differences in psychopathy and individual psychopathic traits
- Examine primary and secondary psychopathy and how psychopathic traits map onto these subtypes for both men and women

Hypotheses

(H1) Men would score higher than women in both primary and secondary psychopathy

(H2) Women would display higher levels of cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, anxiety, and self-control than men

(H3) Emotional empathy would be negatively related to primary psychopathy, but not related to secondary psychopathy

(H4) Cognitive empathy would not be related to either primary or secondary psychopathy

Hypotheses

(H5) Primary psychopathy would be related to low anxiety, and that secondary psychopathy would be associated with high anxiety

(H6) Secondary psychopathy would be associated with low self-control

(H7) There would be no relationship between primary psychopathy and self-control

(H8) Regarding these predicted relationships between psychopathic traits and psychopathy subtypes, it was predicted that these would not differ between men and women

Sample

- A community sample was used as recent research suggests that psychopathy and its traits are on a continuum rather than being categorical (Falkenbach et al., 2014)
- 125 participants were recruited – 73 women and 52 men
- The mean age of the participants was 27.47 (age range = 18-56)

Method

Questionnaire comprised of:

- Demographic questions about age, gender, occupation, and ethnicity
- The Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRP; Levenson et al., 1995)
- The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis 1983)
- The Dispositional Anxiety Measure (DAM; Bates et al., 2014)
- The Self-Control Scale (SCS; Tangney et al., 2004)

Method

- LSRP measures both primary and secondary psychopathy
- IRI measures both cognitive and emotional empathy
- Used a mixture of online and paper questionnaires

Results - MANOVA

- Men scored significantly higher on both primary (F (1, 123) = 7.02, $p < .01$, $eta^2 = .05$) and secondary psychopathy (F (1, 123) = 5.00, $p < .05$, $eta^2 = .04$) than women.

- No significant differences were found between men and women on cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, anxiety, and self-control.

Results – Regressions for Primary and Secondary Psychopathy

- Low cognitive empathy (β = -.29, t = 3.20, p < .01) and low self-control (β = -.31, t = 3.42, p < .01) were predictors of primary psychopathy.

- Only low self-control was a predictor of secondary psychopathy (β = -.54, t = 6.74, p < .001).

Results – Regressions for Primary Split by Gender

- Men = Low cognitive empathy (β = -.41, t = 2.61, p < .05) and low self-control (β = -.37, t = 2.58, p < .05) were predictors.

- Women = High emotional empathy (β = .33, t = 2.46, p < .05) and low self-control (β = -.26, t = 2.37, p < .05) were predictors.

Results – Regressions for Secondary Split by Gender

- Men = Low cognitive empathy (β = -.32, t = 2.35, p < .05), low self-control (β = -.55, t = 4.58, p < .001) and high anxiety (β = .39, t = 2.76, p < .01) were predictors.

- Women = High emotional empathy (β = .27, t = 2.27, p < .05) and low self-control (β = -.52, t = 5.30, p < .001) were predictors.

Support for Hypotheses

(H1) Men would score higher than women in both primary and secondary psychopathy

~~(H2) Women would display higher levels of cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, anxiety, and self-control than men~~

~~(H3) Emotional empathy would be negatively related to primary psychopathy, but not related to secondary psychopathy~~

~~(H4) Cognitive empathy would not be related to either primary or secondary psychopathy~~

Support for Hypotheses

~~(H5) Primary psychopathy would be related to low anxiety, and~~ secondary psychopathy would be associated with high anxiety

(H6) Secondary psychopathy would be associated with low self-control

~~(H7) There would be no relationship between primary psychopathy and self-control~~

~~(H8) Regarding these predicted relationships between psychopathic traits and psychopathy subtypes, it was predicted that these would not differ between men and women~~ Except for self-control

Summary of Results

- For men low cognitive empathy and low self-control were related to both primary and secondary psychopathy. High anxiety was related to secondary psychopathy.
- For women high emotional empathy and low self-control were related to both primary and secondary psychopathy.
- The experience of primary and secondary psychopathy may be different for men and women.
- Low self-control was the most robust predictor of primary and secondary psychopathy in both men and women.

Limitations

- Small sample size
- People may not want to be involved in psychopathy research (stigma; Cox et al., 2013)
- Variance explained was quite low, other factors may be involved
- Mixture of online and paper questionnaire may be a problem (anonymity; Gosling et al., 2004)

Implications of Research Results

- Different assessment tools for women
- Conceptualisation of psychopathy may need to be changed
- Low self-control may need to be considered a more important factor in psychopathy
- Still a lack of clarity on psychopathy as a construct
- May be subtypes for men but not for women

Future Research

- Replication of the current study
- Further investigation of gender differences, especially in the subtypes
- Test the results using other measures of psychopathy

Final Conclusion

- Psychopathy still not fully understood
- Current study provides evidence for gender differences in both traits and psychopathy subtypes
- More research needs to be conducted to further investigate these differences

Questions?

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